

## In the Hands of the Cave Dwellers.

A Story of an Apache Raid.

BY G. A. HENTY.

(Copyright, 1900, by S. S. McClure Co.) CHAPTER V.

The time passed very pleasantly. Will had become a great favorite with both Senor Sarasta and his wife, and was treated as one of the family. Donna Clara often accompanied the party on horseback, and when her first shyness with Will had worn off, he found that she was lively and high-spirited. Accustomed to horses from her infancy, she was an admirable rider, and, although both Juan and Will were mounted on some of the best horses on the ranch, she could leave them behind on her favorite mare, a beautiful creature that she herself had broken in.



The Time Passed Very Pleasantly.

At the end of three months Will felt that, much as he was enjoying himself, he must not outstay his welcome; but, upon his brooding the subject of leaving, the whole family protested so indignantly against such an idea, that he felt they really desired him to stop with them. Juan spoke to him on the subject as soon as they started on horseback together that afternoon.

"The idea of your leaving us is altogether preposterous. Will, do you think that we should for a moment let you go? Where, indeed, would you go? What ideas have you in your mind? Are you not one of us completely?"

"You are awfully good to me," was never so happy in my life," Will replied, "but there is reason in all things; I cannot spend my life here. I must be doing something for my living. As I told you, I do not want to return home until I can say to my father, 'I have been a success, I require no favors, and am in a position to keep myself.'"

"I understand that," Juan said, "but how do you propose doing it?"

"I should do it somehow. I can at least ride now, and have more ways of making a living open to me than I had before."

"My dear Will, you are talking nonsense, and if you suppose that we are going to let you go out into the world in that sort of a way you are altogether mistaken; at any rate, the matter alone for the present; we may see our way more clearly in time," and had Will happened to glance at his companion's face he would have been puzzled by the slight smile that glanced across it.

Two months later all hands were busy on the ranch. It was the season at which the herds were weeded out, the old bulls and some of the young ones slaughtered, skinned and boiled down. Will only once accompanied Senor Sarasta and Juan to the scene of operations. He was interested in the numbers of Indians, with their squaws and young ones, who had come down and established a camp of their own. They were free to take as much meat as they pleased, not only for eating, but for drying for future consumption; broad thin slices of flesh were cut up and hung on ropes between poles to dry in the sun. Three days sufficed for the operation. The meat, now as hard as leather, was pounded by the women between heavy stones, and then mixed with a little salt and packed tightly in bags made of skins. In this state it would keep for an indefinite time. Will Harland often went there, but could not be induced to approach the spot where the animals were slaughtered. The nearest he called by Senor Sarasta and Juan on what they called his faint-heartedness.

"I admit all you say," he replied, "I don't mind going into a fight myself, but I cannot stand seeing those poor brutes killed. I know that it is necessary, and that your vaqueros do it almost instantaneously; at the same time it is not necessary for me to see it. I would very much rather stay away and watch the natives, with the shriveled old women, and the funny little papooses."

Clara nodded approvingly. "You are quite right, Don Will," she said, "although the others all, like Juan, called him simply by his Christian name, Clara still continued the more formal mode of address. "I never go near the yard myself when it is going on."

"Ah, it is one thing for a girl not to like it," Juan said, "but for Will, who I have seen as cool as possible when his life was in danger, and who fired at a man as steadily as if he had been shooting at a target, it seems odd. However, one does not go to see the animals killed; no one can take pleasure in that. The interest lies in the skill and courage of the vaqueros, who are constantly risking their lives; and, indeed, there is scarcely a season passes that one or two of them are not killed."

The work occupied nearly a month; then Juan started for his father at San Diego, where the formal betrothal of the former was to take place. At this his father's presence was necessary, and the latter would make his usual arrangements for chartering a ship to go down to receive the hides and skins full of tallow at the mouth of the river. Will had again proposed that he should accompany them and say good-bye to them there. As before, his proposal was scoffed at.

"It will be time enough to think of that when I go down three months hence to be married," Juan said, "and now you must take our places here, and look after my mother and sister. You will have to keep the part of my younger brother, and keep things straight. When we come back, we will have a serious talk about the future."

Will was indeed now quite at home at the work at the ranch, and not infrequently rode in one direction to give orders respecting the herds, while Juan rode in the other, and the vaqueros all regarded him as being invested with authority by their master. The report of Antonio and Sancho of what had taken place at San Diego, and on the road, had greatly predisposed them in his favor, and the manner in which he had succeeded in sitting a horse that few of them would venture to mount had greatly increased their respect for him. Don Senor Sarasta settled the matter by saying: "If you were to go with Juan I could not leave at the same time, Will, and I particularly wish to be present at his betrothal. It would be strange and contrary to all custom if one of his family were not to be there; still we could hardly be away together unless there were some one here to take our place. You know there are constantly questions referred to us. One herd strays into the ground allotted to another, disputes arise between vaqueros, but we have some one in authority must be here."

"Very well, sir. Then, if you think that I could be really useful, I should be only too glad to stay. You know that my own inclinations are all that way. I have already been here five months, and I feel that this delightful life must come to an end before long. However, since you are good enough to say that I can really be of use in your absence, I will gladly remain here until Juan goes down again to fetch his bride."

Two days later the Mexican and his son rode off, accompanied by six well-armed horsemen. Will found plenty to do, and was out the greater part of the day. Two days after the others had started he saw one of the Indians talking to Antonio. As soon as the latter saw him he left the Indian and came up to him.

"This Indian, who is one of the chiefs of our tribe, tells me that there is a report that the Indians on the other side of the river are preparing for an expedition. It is supposed that it is against another tribe farther east. They have not raided on this side of the river for many years, but he thought that it was as well to let us know that they are at present in an unsettled state. He says that he will have some of his warriors down near the river, and that he will let us know as soon as he has any certain news. 'Is there anything to be done, do you think, Antonio?'"

"No, senor; there are frequently wars going on between the Indians to the north, but we have never had any trouble with them since we came here. If our Indians thought that there was any danger, they would very soon be flocking down here, for they have all been promised that they should be supplied with firearms every thing of that sort to happen, and they know that, with the aid of our people, they could beat off any number of these redskins."

"I have no doubt that we could defend ourselves, Antonio; however, you see that in Don Sarasta's absence I have a very heavy responsibility, and I think that it would be as well to take some precaution. Will you ask the chief to send down a dozen of his warriors? They shall be paid in powder and in blankets, whatever is the usual sum. I want them to establish themselves round the hacienda, to keep guard at night. I don't mean that they shall stay close to the house, but to scout down toward the river, so that in case of alarm there would be time to get you all in from the huts. How many sleep there?"

"There are about thirty of us who look after the herds in the lower parts of the valley, and eight or ten peons who work in the garden round the house."

"Well, that force, with the half-dozen servants in the house, would be able to hold the hacienda against almost any number of Indians, and you could all be here in ten minutes from the alarm being given."

"Very well, senor, I will tell the chief."

He talked for a few minutes with the Indian.

"He will send twelve of his braves down tomorrow," he said, when he rejoined Will.

"Yes, well, let him do so; I shall certainly feel more comfortable. What



A LARGE BAND OF INDIANS RODE DOWN TO THE BANK AND AT ONCE OPENED FIRE.

tribe do these Indians on the other side of the river belong to?"

"They are a branch of the Tejanas, who are themselves a branch of the Apaches. The headquarters of the tribe lay on the east side of the Arizona, between Gila river and the little Soladora. The Tejanas live between them and the Colorado; they are just as bad as the Apaches themselves, and both of them are scourges to the northern districts of Mexico."

"What are our Indians?"

"They are a branch of the Geniueh Indians. They live among the hills between Iron Bluff, sixty miles below us, and those hills you see as many miles up. A good many of them hunt during the season on the other side as far east as Aquarius mountains, in what is known as the Mohave country, but they never go farther south than side than the river Santa Maria, for the Tejanas would be down upon them if

they caught them in what they consider their country."

"I wish the senor was back," Will said, "though I dare say it is all right, and that, as the Indians haven't made a raid across here for many years, they will not do so now. How would they get across the river?"

"They would swim across, senor. An Indian thinks nothing of swimming a wide river, he simply slips off his horse, and either puts his hands on its back or more generally holds on by its tail."

"Have these fellows guns?"

"A great many of them have. They capture them from the Mexicans, or in peaceable times trade skins or their blankets or their Indian trumpery for them. It is against the law to sell guns to the Indians, but most Mexicans will make a bargain if they have the chance, without the slightest regard to any law."

"How is it that the Mexican government does not try and get rid of these Indians? I see by the map that the frontier line is a long way north of the Gila."

"Yes, senor; they may put the line



Antonio Rode Up at a Headlong Gallop.

where you like, but there is not a white man in a couple of hundred miles north of the Gila river except on the Santa Fe river, and even there they are never safe from the Apaches and the Navajos. Why, it would want an army of 20,000 men to venture among the mountains north of the Gila, and they would all die of starvation before they ever caught sight of an Apache. No, senor; unless there is an earthquake and the whole region is swallowed up, I don't see any chance of getting the head of the red rasals."

After entering the house Will said nothing of the news which he had heard. It seemed that there was no real ground for alarm, and yet he could not but feel very uneasy. The next morning he rode down to the river, where a number of peons were engaged in loading the rafts with hides and tallow. He had told Donna Sarasta that he should be down there all day, as he wanted to get the work pushed on. He had been there but two hours when Antonio rode up at a headlong gallop.

"What is it, Antonio?" Will exclaimed, for it was evident from the man's appearance that his errand was one of extreme importance.

"The hacienda has been attacked by Indians, senor; I was with the herd two miles this side of it when I heard some shots fired. I galloped to see what was the matter, but when I got within a quarter of a mile I saw that the Indians were swarming round it. A dozen started in pursuit of me, but they did not follow me far."

Will stood as one thunderstruck.

"But how can they have got there, Antonio?"

"They must have come by what is called the little gap. You know it, senor—that valley that runs off from the other nearly abreast of the hacienda. Following that and crossing a shoulder you cross down on to the river some ten miles higher up. They must have crossed there by swimming in the night."

"But the chief said he had scouts there."

"They could hardly watch thirty miles of the river, senor, besides the redskins would have sent over two or three swimmers to silence any one they found near the place where they were to cross."

By this time a dozen other vaqueros who had been warned by Antonio as he

will be now. Then he turned to the peons. "You have heard what I said. Get to the rafts at once; there is not a moment to be lost. Look at that herd galloping wildly; you may be sure that the redskins are after them."

"The senor's advice is good," Antonio said, "and there is not a moment to be lost. Get on board, all of you, comrades; tie your bridles to the rafts." All hurried on to the rafts, the ropes that held them to the shore were cut, and the peons, putting out the poles, pushed them into the stream. The rafts were already heavily laden, by far the greater portion of the cargo having been placed on board. Most of the vaqueros had their rifles slung across their shoulders, as they had heard from Antonio that the Indian had said, and had on starting out taken their guns with them.

"One never can tell what will happen," Antonio said, "it is always well to be on the safe side."

Although the peons exerted themselves to the utmost, the rafts moved but slowly, and they were but seventy or eighty yards from the shore when a large band of Indians rode down to the bank and at once opened fire. As they approached Will shouted to all the men to take their places on the other side of the piles of hide, and, using these as a breastwork, those having guns at once returned the Indian fire. Five or six of the redskins fell, and the plunging of many horses showed that they were wounded. A chief who seemed to be in command waved his hand and shouted to his followers, who were evidently about to urge their horses into the river when Will, who had held his fire, took a steady aim at the chief, and the latter fell dead from his horse.

"Will they take to the water, Antonio?" he asked the vaquero, who had taken his place on the raft with him.

"I do not think so, senor; it is not in Indian nature to run such a risk as that. We should shoot down numbers of them before they reached us, and they would have a tough job then, for the peons would fight desperately with their long knives, and it is no easy matter to climb over the water on to a raft with two or three men with long knives waiting for you. This band are Apaches, senor; they have evidently joined the Tejanas in a big raid."

The Indians for a few minutes continued their fire, but as those on the rafts showed their heads when they stood up to fire, and every bullet told in the crowded mass, the Indians suddenly rode off.

The peons then resumed their poles, and in ten minutes reached the opposite shore. Will sat down as soon as he had seen the horses landed with a feeling of despair in his heart. In the hurried arrangements for the safety of those with him he had scarcely had time to think. Now that there was nothing to do the full horror of the situation was felt and the thought of Donna Sarasta and of Clara being murdered altogether overpowered him, and his cheeks were moistened with tears.

What would the senor and Juan say on their return? They had left him in charge, and although he could hardly be said to be to blame, yet he might have taken greater precautions. He should not have relied upon the Indian scouts, but have kept at least enough of the men up at the house to offer a serious defense. Antonio, who was at the head of one of the parties in charge of a herd, came up to him presently.

"Well, senor, 'tis no use grieving, and assuredly if any one is to blame it is I rather than you, for I assured you that the matter was in good hands. I shall tell the senor so when he comes. Had he been here he would, I feel sure, have waited for further news before regarding the matter as serious. Now, senor, what do you propose to do next? You are our leader?"

"The first thing to do is to go to the hacienda after dark, and to find out what has happened there. How long do you think that the Indians will remain in the valley?"

"Some days, I should say, senor. They will not doubt kill a number of cattle and jerk them meat. They will drive off as many as they think they can take with them, and probably slay the rest out of pure wickedness."

"That is a great point is to find out whether all at the hacienda have been killed."

"That you may be sure of, senor; but still it is right that we should know. There is one exception, although I can hardly hope."

"What do you mean, Antonio?"

"I mean, senor, that the senorita may have been spared for a worse fate. I mean, she may have been carried off by them. The Indians, while sparing no one else, old or young, always carry off the young women."

"Great heavens!" Will exclaimed, stepping back as if he had been struck. "You do not say so! A thousand times better had she been murdered by her mother's side. It is maddening to sit here and be able to do nothing, not even to be able to find out if this dreadful thing is true. How many men have we with guns?"

"Thirteen besides myself and you, senor."

"Those who have no rifles will be useless, they had better go down with the rafts as soon as it becomes dark."

"Yes, senor, that would be best. The Indians are sure to swim across in the night, and the four rafts would do well to push off as soon as they can no longer be seen from the other side. The four head men, who will go down with them, are my hope."

"Call them up."

The four white men came to him. "As soon as it is dark," he said, "you must push off; do not make the slightest noise; when you get out in the middle of the stream let the current take you down, only using the poles when it is absolutely necessary to keep you from approaching either bank. The twelve vaqueros who have no guns had better go with you; that will give three to each raft. We will pick out thirteen of the best horses, the others you must kill this afternoon for food. Have your fishing lines?"

"Yes, senor, we always carry them with us, and you have spears and can fish by torchlight."

"Good! that you will manage very well. The vaqueros, and what peons you do not require must be landed as soon as you have passed the mountains; that is, better strike out to the river, and wait there for orders. I will give money to one of them to buy a horse there and ride with the news to Don Sarasta at San Diego."

(To be continued.)

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